

Helicopter Overwater Survival Training (HOST) Program

What is it?

The HOST course is designed for active and reserve component aviation officers, warrant officers and enlisted personnel serving as or assigned to serve as a rated or non-rated crewmember. HOST is a prerequisite to Flight School. Training begins in the classroom then moves to a swimming pool equipped with a state-of-the-art Underwater Problem Solving Egress Trainer (UPSET) and Helicopter Underwater Egress Trainer (HUET). Students learn how to extract themselves from a sinking and inverted helicopter to replicate experience from an overwater ditching aircraft emergency. Water Survival Instructors prepare students for that eventuality by providing instruction in underwater egress and underwater problem solving techniques used, validated, and proven over time by the U.S. Navy. The HOST course requires 4.2 hours of academic training, and 5.0 hours of practical exercises which require the use of a Helicopter Underwater Egress Trainer (HUET), a Shallow Water Egress Trainer (SWET) and an Underwater Problem Solving Egress Trainer (UPSET). This training includes hazards to aircraft and personnel during overwater operations, operation of safety and survival equipment, pre-ditching and surface survival procedures. This course also provides the aircrew with the skills and knowledge to effectively use an Emergency Breathing Device (EBD). Training includes the procedures for performing emergency underwater egress procedures in accordance with the Performance Requirement Summary (PRS) from a Shallow Water Egress Trainer (SWET) and a simulated helicopter Water Egress Trainer (WET) with and without the use of an EBD. This course is structured in one phase, and four modules.

What has Army Aviation done?

Prior to 2003, Army Aviators who required HOST/ Dunker training were trained at U.S. Navy facilities. In December 2003, the Army implemented its very own water survival training program which entailed a two-day course. Training day one included initial Helicopter Emergency Egress Device System (HEEDS/SEA MKII) training followed by the SWET and Dunker Training. Training day two included SWET and Dunker Training without the SEA MKII and limited surface survival training. In November 2006, the Army saw a need for swim training due to the failure of students to perform comfortably and safely during training. The swim training taught the student how to relax and not panic in order to help build their self confidence which in turn allowed them to complete the dunker training course unassisted. In January 2007, an approved revision of the two-day course was implemented focusing more on current Army operational procedures, statistics, equipment, and real-world scenarios. Also in 2007 the Army implemented the first-ever Joint Enroute Care Course (JECC) for the flight medics, nurses and doctors. Before this the medical community received no survival training. In November 2008 the two-day course was reduced to a one-day course to eliminate redundant classroom lectures, minimize medical problems encountered due to chlorine water in the sinus and barotraumas of the ear, cost savings and conserve resources, and allow the program to expand and open more slots to keep up with the high demand for the program. This change meets military certification standards and increased the student load from 2,960 to 3,660 students per year without an increase to contract cost.

What continued efforts does Army Aviation have planned for the future?

In 2013 the Army will build a state-of-the-art Water Survival Training Center at Fort Rucker, Ala. The plan will include real life night time training, realistic extended surface survival, hoist operations, and create inclement weather conditions. The program will develop a Mobile Training Team (MTT) to deploy to Army Installations worldwide with an UPSET device to support troops in need of air or ground Emergency Breathing Device (EBD) training. This will assist both Active and Reserve Component (AC/RC) Aviation units from having to send Soldiers away from home stations to obtain currency training. We will continue to update and design the training to meet the needs of the ever changing overwater operations and maintain oversight to ensure program cost and performance measures are met.

Why is this important to the Army and Army Aviation?

With the global war on terrorism being a real threat to our military forces both at home and abroad, it is imperative that they be trained to survive not only on land but in any type of water environment that crews face while completing and executing the mission. These skills are a baseline to enhance the soldier in whatever they may encounter such as trains, commercial planes, and other modes of transportation. We are teaching a high risk underwater problem solving course that teaches a student discipline, direct actions, and most of all situational awareness. Army Aviation is currently conducting joint force operations with the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. These operations, in addition to the Army's expanding functions, are going to be conducted over water. This will significantly increase the risk and the occurrence of open water survival situations. The average post mishap rescue occurs within two hours after ditching. But in war time that rescue time could and probably will be significantly higher according to statistics. That means that an aviator must have the knowledge and ability to survive that extended time until help arrives. This is another valuable tool that lets the aviators and crewmembers have a variety of proficient skills that will earn them another day to fight and defend our nation at war.

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